

201 CMR: OFFICE OF CONSUMER
AFFAIRS AND BUSINESS REGULATION

201 CMR 14.00: HOME IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTOR ARBITRATION AND GUARANTY
FUND

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14.01: Purpose

(1) Purpose. 201 CMR 14.00 sets forth procedures for operation of private arbitration between homeowners and contractors and/or subcontractors as required by M.G.L. c. 142A, § 4. It is designed to promote the speedy, efficient and fair disposition of disputes arising out of the improvement of an owner-occupied, one-to-four family residential home by a registered contractor or subcontractor. It also sets forth procedures for homeowner access to a Guaranty Fund. The Guaranty Fund, created by M.G.L. c. 142A, § 5, compensates homeowners for actual losses they incur as a result of registered contractor or subcontractor conduct found to be work performed in a poor or unworkmanlike manner or which is a common law violation or a violation of any statute or regulation designed for the protection of consumers.

(2) Applicable Regulations. Other regulations applicable to M.G.L. c. 142A include:

- (a) 780 CMR R6: Registration and Enforcement of the Home Improvement Contractor Program promulgated by the director of the Board of Building Regulations and Standards within the Executive Office of Public Safety.
- (b) 940 CMR 8.00: Mortgage Brokers and Mortgage Lenders promulgated by the Office of the Attorney General.
- (c) 209 CMR 42.00: The Licensing of Mortgage Lenders and Mortgage Brokers promulgated by the Division of Banks and Loan Agencies.

(3) Scope. 201 CMR 14.00 shall apply to all home improvement transactions with a written contract between a homeowner and a contractor or subcontractor registered with the Board of Building Regulations and Standards occurring on or after July 1, 1992. All references in 201 CMR to statutes and other regulations shall include amendments made to such statutes and regulations after the promulgation of 201 CMR 14.00.

14.02: Definitions

Unless otherwise stated, terms used in 201 CMR 14.00 are as defined or used in M.G.L. c. 142A.

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Actual Loss means the amount as calculated pursuant to 201 CMR 14.14 and M.G.L. c. 142A for the exclusive purpose of assigning a monetary value to determine a claimant's guaranty fund award pursuant to 201 CMR 14.00.

Applicant means the owner occupant, authorized tenant or registrant covered by provisions of M.G.L. c. 142A. who files a request for arbitration form with an OCABR approved arbitration firm claiming a failure of performance under a residential home improvement contract.

Arbitration Firm means the individual or arbitration firm the director of OCABR has approved to conduct home improvement arbitrations. Where the approved arbitrator is an individual, the word "arbitration firm," where appropriate, shall apply to the individual.

Arbitrator means any person who has been certified by OCABR to perform home improvement contractor arbitration services either as an individual or in association with an approved firm pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A and 201 CMR 14.00.

BBRS means the Board of Building Regulation and Standards.

Clear and Conspicuous shall be defined in a manner which is consistent with the definition provided by the applicable sections of the Attorney General's Retail Advertising Regulations, 940 CMR 6.01 and 6.01 (f) and the Attorney General's Mortgage Brokers and Mortgage Lenders Regulations, 940 CMR 8.03. 201 CMR 14.00 provides that "clear and conspicuous" shall mean that the material representation being disclosed is of such size, color, contrast, or audibility and is presented so as to be readily noticed and understood by a reasonable person to whom it is being disclosed.

Contractor means any person who owns or operates a contracting business who, through himself or others, undertakes, offers to undertake, purports to have the capacity to undertake, or submits a bid for residential contracting work. For purposes of 201 CMR 14.00, the Board of Building Regulations and Standards will deem a contractor to be duly registered as required by a contractor is a registered contractor if the contractor is registered in accordance with M.G.L. c. 142A and 780 CMR R6 on the date of the contract with the owner.

Customary and Reasonable Effort means that action has been taken by or on behalf of an aggrieved homeowner to secure a satisfactory resolution to a dispute between a home improvement contractor and a homeowner. This standard may be satisfied by the following:

- (a) submitting evidence to the fund administrator that a writ of execution for a monetary court judgment was served upon the contractor by a constable or sheriff at the contractor's last known business address. An arbitration award must be converted to a court judgment in order to obtain a writ of execution for service by a constable or sheriff upon the contractor;
- (b) if the contractor is bankrupt, submitting evidence to the fund administrator from the United States Bankruptcy Court confirming that the contractor has filed for bankruptcy;
- (c) submitting evidence to the fund administrator that a service of court or arbitration order was attempted at all known or suspected addresses of the contractor by a constable or agent of the state; or
- (d) if a claim is properly made before a small claims court, submitting evidence to the fund administrator that a notice to show cause has been served upon the contractor by a constable or sheriff at the contractor's last known business address, and that the contractor has failed to pay the claim and has failed to defend the claim.

Designated Agent means a party any individual designated in writing to represent him or her. A designated party need not be an attorney.

Fund Administrator means the administrator of the Home Improvement Guaranty Fund, appointed by the director of the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation.

Guaranty Fund (including the term "fund") means the Home Improvement Guaranty Fund established pursuant to M.G.L. c.142A.

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OCABR means the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation.

Owner (including the term “homeowner”) means any owner of a pre-existing owner-occupied building containing at least one but not more than four dwelling units, or a tenant authorized by the owner thereof, who orders, contracts for, or purchases the services of a contractor or subcontractor. An owner occupying a condominium in a building containing no more than four dwelling units qualifies as an owner under this definition. A condominium association does not qualify as an owner.

Owner-Occupied means the residential building of at least one but not more than four dwelling units and occupied by the owner as a primary residence.

Registrant means any person duly registered as a home improvement contractor or subcontractor under the provisions of M.G.L. c. 142A and 780 CMR R6.

Registration number means the number assigned to the contractor or subcontractor after s/he has been approved for registration by the Board of Building Regulations and Standards.

Request for Arbitration Form means the form provided by the director of OCABR to approved arbitration firms for dissemination to applicants who must then complete the form and return it to the arbitration firm when filing for an arbitration hearing.

Unworkmanlike Manner means that materials which are used and methods which are employed are of substandard, unreasonable, imprudent, or inadequate quality or are inconsistent with good construction practices; that materials used and methods employed are wholly or partially inaccurate or unacceptable in final appearance or function; or, that materials used and methods employed are unsafe or may result in an unsafe or non-functional final product.

14.03: Arbitration Requests

(1) List of Approved Arbitration Firms. The director of OCABR shall maintain a list of arbitration firms which have been approved to arbitrate home improvement complaints under M.G.L. c. 142A and 201 CMR 14.00. Such list shall be public and shall be made available upon request.

(2) Arbitration Application. Any eligible party seeking arbitration of a home improvement dispute shall submit a request for arbitration on a form developed by the director of OCABR, to the arbitration firm. The arbitration firm shall supply the form to an applicant on request.

(3) Eligible Arbitration Firms. An applicant must choose an arbitration firm from a list of OCABR approved firms to perform arbitration services.

(4) Homeowner Arbitration Eligibility. If an applicant is a homeowner, the applicant is eligible for arbitration only if the contractor is registered with the director of BBRS and the parties have a written agreement.

(5) Contractor Arbitration Eligibility. If a registered contractor files a request for arbitration, the parties' written agreement must contain an arbitration clause and must be signed by the homeowner. In such an event, the homeowner may file a counterclaim.

(6) Arbitration Attendance. If an applicant's request for arbitration is accepted, the parties or their designated agents must attend the arbitration, except as provided in 201 CMR 14.13(a).

(7) Application Deadline. The arbitration firm must receive a request for arbitration within two years of the date of the contract signed by the registrant and the homeowner. A request for arbitration form shall be deemed timely filed if it is date stamped or postmarked within this time period.

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- (8) Application Requirements. To be accepted for arbitration, the request for arbitration must:
- (a) comply with 201 CMR 14.03(2) and (3);
 - (b) be complete;
 - (c) be for a one-to-four unit, owner-occupied residence or property located in Massachusetts;
 - (d) be for work contracted for on or after July 1, 1992;
 - (e) include a narrative description of the problem;
 - (f) involve a contractor registered with the Board of Building Regulations and Standards;
 - (g) include payment of the required application fee and a copy of the written contract; and
 - (h) include a monetary amount sought or clearly indicate that only specific performance is sought.
- (9) Eligible Places for Arbitration. All arbitration hearings must take place in a neutral location within a 50-mile radius of the residence or property in dispute, unless the parties agree otherwise.
- (10) Tolling of Application Deadline. A request for arbitration must be filed within two years of the effective date of the contract between the parties. However, the two-year statute of limitations shall be tolled in those instances where an aggrieved homeowner enters into formal mediation proceedings or where equity so requires.
- (11) Parties to Arbitration. Absent a court order, only the homeowner or owner-authorized tenant and the registered contractor shall be parties to an arbitration conducted under M.G.L. ch. 142A. The arbitration firm, arbitrator and OCABR do not have authority to join third parties.
- (12) Prohibition Against Consolidation. Absent a court order or the written approval of OCABR, neither the arbitration firm nor the arbitration shall consolidate an arbitration case with another arbitration case.

14.04: Arbitration Firm

- (1) Firm Duties. The arbitration firm must be able to take on the daily administrative duties of the program and be able to provide information and counsel to prospective applicants. These duties shall include, but not be limited to, reviewing cases for technical acceptability; checking the status of the contractor or subcontractor to determine if s/he is registered with the Board of Building Regulations and Standards; collecting application fees; providing information to the parties prior to the hearing; providing tape recorders and tapes for the hearing; providing training sessions for new arbitrators; reviewing arbitrators' decisions; acting on requests for technical corrections; providing tapes of the hearing to parties, if requested- providing statistical reports of the program as requested by OCABR; printing and distributing all applications and materials necessary to the program (except that OCABR will create the application form and provide a basic consumer information pamphlet for the program); and providing general record keeping functions.
- (2) Document Retention. The arbitration firm shall retain any documents, tapes and materials for at least three years unless otherwise instructed by OCABR.

14.05: Processing of Request for Arbitration

- (1) Request Intake. The arbitration firm shall date-stamp and assign a case number upon receipt of a submitted request for arbitration form.
- (2) Request Review. The arbitration firm shall review submitted request for arbitration forms for completeness and compliance with 201 CMR 14.03 within two weeks of receipt.
- (a) Incomplete forms, shall be returned to the applicant for completion. Such forms when completed must be received by the OCABR or arbitration firm within 30 days or the applicant's period of eligibility for filing the request, whichever is later. The arbitration firm may reject a request that is not timely filed.
 - (b) Requests not found in compliance with 201 CMR 14.03 shall be rejected and the reason for the rejection shall be sent to the applicant in a timely fashion.

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(3) Request Processing. The arbitration firm shall date-stamp complying, completed, and reviewed forms to indicate their acceptance for arbitration, promptly notify the claimant that the application satisfies the qualifications for acceptance, and advise the claimant of the filing fee due (less the \$50 application fee). Upon receipt of the balance of the filing fee, the arbitration firm shall send to both parties acknowledgment that the case has been accepted. The acceptance date shall trigger a 60-day period in which the hearing must be held and all evidence must be presented.

(4) Incomplete or Erroneous Requests. The arbitration firm may rescind any acceptance of a request for arbitration granted in error or because of incomplete or erroneous information.

14.06: The Arbitrator

(1) Selection of Arbitrator. The arbitration firm shall appoint the arbitrator when the applicant has filed a completed request for arbitration form. Unless determined otherwise by the arbitration firm, a single arbitrator shall conduct each hearing. If there is more than one arbitrator, all the arbitrators shall conduct the hearing, but a majority may determine any question and render a final award.

(2) No Party Approval Power. The choice of the arbitrator is not subject to the approval of either party.

(3) Lack of Bias Requirement. The arbitrator shall not have a personal interest in the outcome of any hearing, nor be acquainted with any of the participants except as such acquaintance may occur in the hearing process, nor hold any prejudice or bias toward any individual party or class of parties which might be involved in the proceedings.

(4) Disclosure of Conflicts. If an arbitrator is currently, or has been in the past, a contractor or subcontractor, either part-time or full time, or if the arbitrator has been the claimant or respondent for any action pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, he must disclose this fact to the parties prior to the hearing. Either party may then request another arbitrator.

(5) Arbitrator Disqualification. If either party has a reasonable basis to believe that an arbitrator has violated either 201 CMR 14.06(3) or (4) that party may request that the arbitrator be disqualified by submitting the request in writing to the Director of OCABR and the arbitration firm before the hearing if based on information known at that time. Any such request shall be submitted in writing to the arbitration firm and the director of OCABR no later than ten days from the date the arbitration firm provides notice of the appointment to the arbitrator.

(6) Code of Ethics. The arbitrator shall be guided by the standards of ethical conduct established in "The Code of Ethics for Arbitrators in Commercial Disputes" prepared by a Joint Committee consisting of a Special Committee of the American Arbitration Association and a Special Committee of the American Bar Association.

(7) Preliminary Telephone Conference. The parties or their attorneys or representatives shall hold a preliminary telephone conference at a date soon after the appointment of the arbitrator, unless the arbitrator determines that a preliminary telephone conference is unnecessary, or unless the parties agree to dispense with the preliminary telephone conference and the arbitrator does not object to such dispensing.

14.07: Settlement by Submission of Documents for Claims of \$10,000 or Less

(1) Written Hearing Presumption. Where no party's claim exceeds \$10,000, exclusive of claimed interest and arbitration fees or costs, the dispute shall be resolved by submission of documents (hereinafter called a written hearing), unless any party requests an oral hearing, or the arbitrator determines that an oral hearing is necessary. A party desiring an oral hearing must notify the arbitration firm and the opposing side within ten days of the notice of acceptance of the case, or, in the event a counterclaim is timely filed, within five days after notice of the firm's acceptance of the counterclaim. After that time, an oral hearing may only be granted with the arbitrator's consent.

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- (2) Written Hearing Procedures. The written hearing shall conform to the following procedures:
- (a) The parties submit in writing to the arbitration firm their respective contentions, including a statement of facts, duly sworn to, together with such proofs properly verified, as they wish to submit. Briefs or written arguments may also be submitted at this time.
 - (b) All such documents and proofs submitted by each party shall be filed with the arbitration firm no later than ten days after the mailing of the notice by the arbitration firm calling for their filing.
 - (c) All documents and proofs submitted by each party shall be sent to the other party and to the arbitration firm in duplicate.
 - (d) Each party may file one written reply to such statements and proofs within a period of ten days from the date of the arbitration firm's letter to the parties requesting replies.
 - (e) Failure of any party to make such a reply within the specified period of time shall be deemed to be a waiver of its right to reply.
 - (f) When all of the statements, proofs and answers (if any) have been received by the arbitration firm, they shall be transmitted to the arbitrator.
 - (g) The arbitrator shall examine the documents and request further evidence from either party, or both parties, if necessary, within ten days of receipt. The documents submitted to the arbitrator and the arbitration firm for the written hearing shall be the official record of the hearing.
 - (h) Either party may request, on no more than one occasion, that the arbitrator give a seven day extension to the date of submission required by the arbitrator. Such request must be made prior to the date of submission and shall be granted only upon a showing of good cause. If the arbitrator does not request further evidence, the written hearing is declared closed at this time and the requirements of 201 CMR 14.15 apply.

14.08: Notification and Scheduling of Arbitration Hearing

- (1) Place of Hearings. When scheduling hearings, the arbitrator shall attempt to accommodate the geographic and time-of-day needs of the parties.
- (2) Weekday Presumption. Evening and weekend hours may be made available for hearings if justified and mutually agreed upon by the parties and the arbitrator.
- (3) Notice of Arbitration Acceptance. Within seven days after the acceptance of a request for arbitration form, the arbitration firm shall mail notice thereof to the parties. General information about the arbitration process shall be included with the notice including all procedural rules.
- (4) Counterclaim Deadline and Fee. All counterclaims must be submitted to the arbitration firm within ten days after notice from the arbitration firm of acceptance of the case. In the absence of extraordinary circumstances, the arbitrator may grant a party no more than one seven-day extension of the time in which to respond to the demand for arbitration or counterclaim. Additional claims and amendments may not be submitted without leave from the arbitrator. No new or different claim may be submitted, however, once the time for filing has expired. The party filing a counterclaim must pay a fee in accordance with the fee schedule established by OCABR. The fee must be paid upon filing.
- (5) Notice of Hearing. The arbitration firm shall mail notice of the date, time, location of the hearing, and name of the arbitrator to both parties no later than 21 days prior to the hearing.
- (6) Hearing Date. The date of the hearing shall be within 45 days of the acceptance of the request for arbitration form. The arbitrator may extend the 45 day hearing period only upon a showing of extraordinary circumstances or upon the written consent of both of the parties.
- (7) Hearing Confirmation. The arbitrator or arbitration firm may call both parties to confirm the hearing date. A call placed no later than seven days prior to the hearing shall constitute sufficient notice of the hearing should either party claim nonreceipt of the notice provided for in 201 CMR 14.09.

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14.09: Disclosure of Information

- (1) Document Disclosure and Settlement of Disputes. Each party shall provide to the other party any documents or information that s/he intends to present at the hearing no later than two days before the hearing including copies of all hearing exhibits. The arbitrator shall decide any disputes over the production of information.
- (2) Home Inspections By Registrant. Upon reasonable request by the registrant, if such request is received no later than seven days prior to the scheduled date of the hearing, the homeowner shall permit the registrant to inspect his residence or property, which ever is the subject of the complaint. The homeowner shall have the right to be present at such inspection. The registrant shall use no tools other than diagnostic tools and shall not make any repairs or adjustments.
- (3) Prohibition Against Discovery. There shall be no discovery except as provided in 201 CMR 14.09(1) and 14.09(2), unless each party consents or unless discovery is ordered by the arbitrator for the following reasons:
 - (a) The arbitrator finds that the discovery is likely to be necessary to render a proper arbitration decision; or
 - (b) The arbitrator finds that the discovery is likely to be necessary for a party to present a material element of the case against the other party.
- (3) Additional Information Deadline. The parties shall comply with the arbitrator's requests for additional information within seven days, or within such period as the arbitrator designates.
- (4) Inspections By Arbitrator. At either party's request, and if the arbitrator deems it appropriate, the arbitrator may view the residence or property that is the subject of the dispute. Upon reasonable notice to both parties, the arbitrator may view the site alone or s/he may be accompanied by both parties, their designated agent or by such person or persons whom she may deem necessary.
- (5) Representation By An Attorney. Any party represented by an attorney or other authorized agent must disclose the name, address and telephone number of the representative to the arbitration firm and the opposing side at least seven days prior to the first scheduled hearing date or date for submission of documents as set forth in 201 CMR 14.01.

14.10: Rescheduling, Arbitration Hearings

- (1) Rescheduling. Either party may request, on no more than one occasion, that the arbitrator reschedule the arbitration hearing. Such request must be made prior to the day of the hearing and shall be granted only upon a showing of good cause.
- (2) New Hearing Date. If a request for rescheduling is granted, the arbitrator shall record the date the request was received, and assign a new hearing date and location if at all possible falling within the original 45 day period provided for in 201 CMR 14.07(4). The arbitrator shall notify both parties of the new date as soon as practical and by any means appropriate for the time then remaining before the hearing.
- (3) Good Cause Rescheduling. The arbitrator may reschedule any hearing for good cause. If at all possible, the new hearing date shall be within the original 45 day period provided for in 201 CMR 14.07(4).
- (4) Notice of Rescheduled Hearing. The arbitrator shall notify both parties of the reason for the delay and the new date as soon as practical.

14.11: Failure to Appear

- (1) Failure to Appear Defaults. If a party fails to appear at the hearing, the arbitrator may enter a finding by default against that party upon a determination that the appearing party has made a showing of sufficient facts to warrant an award.

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(2) Default Forgiveness. If the defaulting party, within a reasonable period after the hearing as determined by the arbitrator, demonstrates good cause to the arbitrator for failing to appear, the arbitrator may set aside the default. A new hearing may then be scheduled pursuant to 201 CMR 14.00 or a written hearing may be used to resolve the dispute pursuant to 201 CMR 14.06.

(3) Failure to Appear Arbitration. An arbitration may proceed in the absence of any party or representative who, after due notice, fails to be present or fails to obtain a postponement.

14.12: Withdrawal

(1) Arbitration Request Withdrawal. An applicant may withdraw his/her request for arbitration at any time prior to the hearing by notice to the arbitrator and to the other party. Cases withdrawn at any time as a result of a settlement agreement between the parties may be refiled if either party fails to honor the settlement terms.

(2) Withdrawals Without Prejudice. A withdrawal received prior to the day of the hearing shall constitute a withdrawal without prejudice from the arbitration system, except that the timeliness of the applicant's request for arbitration shall be preserved for two months after the first voluntary withdrawal.

(3) Withdrawals With Prejudice. A withdrawal received on or after the day of the hearing or as a result of a default without good cause shall be a withdrawal with prejudice.

14.13: The Hearing

(1) Single Arbitrator. A single arbitrator shall preside over each hearing, unless otherwise determined by the arbitration firm. The conduct of the hearing shall encourage a full and complete disclosure of the facts.

(2) Four Hour Hearing Limit. The hearing shall last no longer than four hours. If the arbitrator determines that additional time is necessary to obtain sufficient evidence to render an award, the arbitrator may extend the hearing time. The hearing may also be extended upon the agreement of each of the parties and the arbitrator. When a hearing is extended, the arbitrator shall be required to account for the additional time in the final award.

(3) Arbitration Hearing Record. The arbitrator shall tape record the hearing. Said tape shall be the official record of the hearing and the parties may not make independent tapes of the hearing. Copies of the official record tape may be obtained from the arbitration firm or OCABR for a nominal fee. The formal rules of evidence shall not apply.

(4) Oath. The arbitrator shall administer an oath or affirmation to each individual who testifies.

(5) Evidence Presentation. The parties may introduce any relevant evidence that will assist the arbitrator in making a decision. Unduly repetitious or clearly irrelevant evidence may be excluded. It shall, however, be in the arbitrator's sole discretion whether to examine the residence or property.

(6) Completeness Responsibility. Each party is responsible for presenting all his or her evidence in a concise manner on the day(s) of the hearing.

(7) Questions of Opposing Party. The arbitrator shall allow each party to question the other after his or her presentation and shall allow questions of each witness after his or her testimony. The arbitrator may question any party or witness at any time.

(8) Order of Hearing. The arbitrator shall determine the order of the hearing.

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- (9) Oral Hearing Presumption. For claims over \$10,000, the hearing procedure presupposes that both parties or their designated agent will be present. However, within the arbitrator's discretion, either party may offer written testimony only, as long as the arbitrator and the other party are informed of such and are in receipt of the evidence at least seven days prior to the day of the hearing. Written hearings shall be conducted pursuant to the procedures set out in 201 CMR 14.07(2).
- (10) Sworn Statement. All written testimony shall include a statement signed by the witness under oath that his or her testimony is true.
- (11) Discretionary Arbitrator Consultations. The arbitrator may consult with the building inspector or any other expert witness for technical advice or testimony. The arbitrator shall provide a report of any such consultation to all parties. The arbitrator may in his or her discretion allow rebuttal to the report.
- (12) Unmanageable Hearings. After a warning, the arbitrator may terminate any hearing that becomes unmanageable due to the behavior of either party and enter judgment by default against the party whose behavior made the hearing unmanageable.
- (13) Additional Good Cause Hearings. For good cause shown as determined by the arbitrator, the arbitrator may schedule one additional hearing after the initial hearing within a reasonable time period as determined by the arbitrator.
- (14) Non-compliance Orders. If either party fails to comply with 201 CMR 14.00, the arbitrator or the arbitration firm shall make such orders as are just.

14.14: Determining Actual Loss

The calculation of Actual Loss for determining payments from the Guaranty Fund shall be measured by the following methods:

- (1) Calculation When No Work Is Performed. If the contractor abandoned the contract without doing any work, the actual loss shall be the amount which the homeowner paid to the contractor under the terms of the contract.
- (2) Calculation When Some of the Work Is Performed. If the contractor partially and properly completed some of the work which was agreed to under the terms of the contract, the actual loss shall be totalled by adding the amount of the reasonable cost of completing the contract and, if necessary, repairing the contractor's defective performance, and by subtracting the part of the contract price that has not been paid by the owner.
- (a) Determination of Grossly Underbid Contracts. Upon a determination by the arbitrator or OCABR that the contractor grossly underbid the contract with the result that competent workmanship to finish the contract will cost significantly more than the original contract price, the actual loss will not include the owner's cost to complete the contract.
- (b) Calculation for Grossly Underbid Contracts. Upon such a determination, the actual loss shall be the amount which the owner paid to the contractor, minus the value of any work properly completed, minus the cost of any materials properly used, plus, if necessary, the cost to correct that portion of the contracted work that was improperly completed.
- (3) Calculation When All of the Work Is Performed, But Performed Incorrectly. If the contractor fully but improperly completed work that was agreed to under the terms of the contract, the actual loss shall be the amount required to correct the improperly completed work.

14.15: The Decision

- (1) Decision Deadline. The arbitrator shall submit an arbitration decision to the arbitration firm and/or OCABR no later than 14 days from the date the hearing is closed. The arbitration firm shall mail a copy of the decision to both parties.

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- (2) Form of Decision. The arbitrator shall insure that all decisions are in writing, dated and signed. The written decision shall contain a finding of facts, and a clear calculation of the monetary award if any is ordered. The written decision may contain an award of specific performance, or an order as appropriate. In addition, the written decision may include a monetary determination of the claimant's actual loss as specified in 201 CMR 14.14.
- (3) Award Compliance. If the homeowner prevails, the arbitrator may require the registrant to complete the work, repair or replace the work or pay the homeowner a monetary amount, or any other remedy or combination of remedies the arbitrator sees fit to award. The arbitrator may also set a time limitation for compliance pursuant to 201 CMR 14.17(1).
- (4) Calculation of Value of Specific Performance. In the case of an award of specific performance, the arbitrator shall assign a monetary value to said award for the exclusive purpose of determining a claimant's actual loss. Payment of said monetary value shall not be considered a compliance alternative to the award of specific performance unless allowed under the stated terms of the award.
- (5) Contract Access for Specific Performance Awards. In the case of an award of specific performance, the arbitrator may allow the registrant access to the residence or property to complete or repair the work if he is satisfied that allowing continued access to the property would not result in non-correction of the problem complained of or further damage to the premises. The arbitrator shall not award specific performance unless the homeowner provides written consent for the registrant to enter the homeowner's property.
- (6) Payment of Registrant Counterclaims. If the registrant prevails on a properly filed counterclaim, the arbitrator may require the homeowner to pay the registrant a monetary amount.
- (7) Limitations of Award Content. Any monetary award may include contractual damages, including consequential damages, and arbitration fees. No monetary award shall include attorneys fees or punitive damages.

14.16: Disputing the Arbitrator's Decision

- (1) Technical Corrections By Administrators. The arbitrator, arbitration firm or the director of OCABR may make "technical corrections" to a decision. "Technical corrections" shall include computational corrections, typographical corrections, and other minor corrections. Determination as to whether or not a requested correction qualifies as technical shall be the decision of the arbitration firm and/or OCABR.
- (2) Technical Correction Requests. Either party may request a technical correction. Such requests shall be made in writing, setting forth the requested correction and reason therefor, and must be received by the arbitration firm and the other party within 14 days after the mailing of the arbitrator's full written decision. A request for technical corrections will not stop any award appeal period.
- (3) Appeals. A dissatisfied party may file an appeal pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, § 4. The party requesting the appeal must notify OCABR if the appeal is allowed.

14.17: The Award

- (1) Award Completion Deadline. The parties shall cooperate to expedite the completion of the work or the transfer of a monetary award, whichever is appropriate. Any work ordered by the arbitrator's finding shall be completed within 21 days of the mailing date of the finding unless both parties agree otherwise or unless the arbitrator, arbitration firm, or OCABR extends the due date for good cause pursuant to 201 CMR 14.17(5)
- (2) Calculation of Award Appeal Period. In computing any award appeal period, the last day of the period so computed shall be included unless it is not a business day, in which event the period shall run until the end of the next business day.

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(3) Legal Status of Findings of Fact. An arbitrator's findings of fact shall be prima facie evidence in any subsequent appeal brought by either party ensuing from the matter considered in arbitration.

(4) Homeowner Award Confirmation Notice. A prevailing homeowner shall contact the arbitration firm no sooner than 21 days and no later than 30 days after the mailing date of the arbitrator's decision to confirm whether the contractor has complied with the award. If no such notice is received, the arbitration firm shall contact the homeowner promptly. If the contractor has not complied with the award, the arbitration firm shall notify OCABR in writing and include the complete case file along with the notification. OCABR may then notify the home improvement contractor registration authority and/or the attorney general in order to recommend any appropriate sanction against the contractor which may be available to assure compliance of the order.

(5) Extension of Award Compliance Deadline. The arbitration firm or OCABR may extend the due date for the award and the notification date made pursuant to 201 CMR 14.17(4) for a reasonable period of time for good cause. Such extension shall not exceed ten calendar days from the original due date absent extraordinary circumstances. The arbitration firm or OCABR shall provide the extended due date and the reason for the extension to the parties in writing prior to the expiration of the initial time period.

14.18: Establishment of the Guaranty Fund

(1) Establishment of the Guaranty Fund. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, there shall be established a Home Improvement Guaranty Fund within OCABR.

(2) Purpose of Fund. The purpose of the fund is to compensate owners for actual losses as defined by 201 CMR 14.14 and M.G.L. c. 142A incurred as a result of a registrant's conduct which has been found by an approved arbitrator or a court of competent jurisdiction to be work which is:

- (a) performed in a poor or unworkmanlike manner;
- (b) a common law violation or a violation of any statute or regulation designed for the protection of consumers, including but not limited to M.G.L. c. 93A and prohibited acts listed in M.G.L. c. 142A, § 17.

(3) Fund Administrator. A fund administrator, appointed by the director of OCABR, shall be responsible for implementing the provisions of M.G.L. c. 142A and 201 CMR 14.00.

(4) Fund Claim Requirements. A homeowner may make a claim to the fund only if he has complied with the provisions of M.G.L. c. 142A, § 3 and has filed his claim with the fund within six months after the owner has obtained a judgment or arbitration award. All claims shall be filed within this six month period, even if the Owner has not exhausted all collection efforts.

(5) Fund of Last Resort Requirements. Payment from the fund may not be made to the homeowner unless the owner has exhausted all such customary and reasonable efforts as defined in 201 CMR 14.02 to collect the judgment or award.

14.19: Contractor Fees to the Guaranty Fund

(1) Registrant Fees. Every person registered under M.G.L. c. 142A as a home improvement contractor shall pay a fee to the Guaranty Fund with his application for registration.

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(2) Fee Amounts. The amount of the fee shall be determined on a sliding scale based upon the number of persons in the registrant's employ at the time of his application as follows:

| Number of Employees | Guaranty Fund Contribution |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| less than four | \$100 |
| four to ten | \$200 |
| 11 to 30 | \$300 |
| more than 30 | \$500 |

(3) Fee Refunds. If the home improvement contractor registration authority denies an application for registration, the registrant's payment to the guaranty fund shall be refunded.

(4) Presumption Against Multiple Fees. No registrant shall be required to pay the guaranty fund fee more than once unless the fund administrator makes a determination that the amount of the fund is insufficient to maintain it at a level commensurate with claims made against it.

(5) Annual Fee Limitation. No registrant shall be required to pay the guaranty fund fee more than once in any 12 month period.

(6) Additional Assessments. If the fund administrator determines that the amount of the fund is insufficient to maintain it at a level commensurate with claims made against it, after a public hearing and upon consultation with the fund administrator each registrant may be assessed an appropriate fee which shall not exceed the amount of the registrant's original assessment.

(7) Suspension for Non-payment. The fund administrator shall recommend that the registrant's registration be suspended if he fails to pay the required assessment to the guaranty fund within 60 days of submittal of registration application or notification of a reassessment.

(8) Administrative Penalties. Administrative penalties assessed for violations of any provisions of M.G.L. c. 142A committed by registrants shall be deposited into the guaranty fund.

14.20: Duties of Fund-Administrator

(1) Notice to Contractor. No less than 30 days prior to the payment of a claim, and again when a claim has been paid, the fund administrator shall provide written notice to the contractor found responsible for the claim that such payment will be, or has been made. The notice shall be sent to the last known address of the contractor by certified mail, return receipt requested, and shall include information about the contractor's responsibility to reimburse the fund as well as any sanctions which may be imposed pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A for non-payment.

(2) Fund Reimbursement. When a payment from the fund is awarded to an owner as a result of a claim against a registered contractor, the fund administrator may, at his or her discretion:

- (a) require the contractor to reimburse the fund in full within 30 days of notification that a claim has been paid; or,
- (b) initiate an agreement with the contractor allowing said contractor to reimburse the fund by installment, the frequency and amount of which shall be determined by the fund administrator.

(3) Revocations of Registration for Non-Reimbursement. If the contractor fails to reimburse the fund pursuant to 201 CMR 14.20(2), the fund administrator shall recommend that the contractor's registration be revoked pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, § 2. The fund administrator shall also notify the Attorney General at the same time and recommend that legal proceedings to recover the unpaid amount which is, to be reimbursed to the fund be initiated pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, § 8.

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(4) Fund Administrator Reports. The fund administrator shall provide a written report to the director of OCABR on a semiannual basis relative to the fund. Said report shall, provide general information about the fund, including, but not limited to investment and interest income, liquidity of funds, contractor contributions, claims and other disbursements paid from the fund relative health of the fund and any recommendations pertaining to maintaining the solvency of the fund. Said report shall be made available to the general public upon request.

14.21: Payments from the Guaranty Fund

- (1) Award Amounts. The fund administrator may award:
 - (a) to any single claimant no more than \$10,000 or the amount necessary to compensate the claimant for his actual loss, whichever is less; and
 - (b) no more than \$75,000 per 12 month period in aggregate claims which are the result of a single registrant's actions pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, unless the registrant has repaid the fund for the full amount required pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, § 8; provided however that it is within the discretion of the fund administrator to waive the limit with cause.
- (2) Registered Contractor Requirement. Payments from the fund may only be awarded to an "owner" who contracts with a registered contractor, as defined in 201 CMR 14.02.
- (3) Unregistered Contractors. Payments from the fund may not be awarded in cases where the home improvement contractor was unregistered.
- (4) Building Permit Requirement. Payments from the fund may not be awarded to an owner who secured his or her own building permit for the contracted work in dispute unless the contractor failed to inform the homeowner, as required by M.G.L. c. 142A, § 2, that homeowners who secure their own permits will be so excluded from the fund.
- (5) Actual Loss Payments. Payments from the fund may only be awarded for actual losses as defined by 201 CMR 14.14 and M.G.L. c. 142A and may not be awarded for consequential or punitive damages, personal injury, attorney's fees, court or arbitration costs or interest.
- (6) Required Process. Payments from the fund may be awarded to an owner only if he has brought an action to enforce any provision of M.G.L. c. 142A in court or, in the alternative, through the state approved arbitration program as outlined in 201 CMR 14.00, and has exhausted all such customary and reasonable efforts to collect the judgment or award, and has filed his claim with the fund in the time frame allowed.
- (7) Application. Payments from the fund may be awarded to an owner only after the fund administrator receives a completed application form provided by OCABR.
- (8) Additional Application Documents. Accompanying the application form, the homeowner shall submit a copy of any court or arbitration judgment obtained against the registrant including findings of fact and conclusions of law, if any. In addition, a notarized affidavit signed and sworn to by the homeowner shall be submitted, affirming that:
 - (a) s/he has complied with all the requirements of M.G.L. c. 142A;
 - (b) s/he has obtained a court judgment or arbitration finding;
 - (c) all or some specified portion of the, court judgment or arbitration finding remains unpaid;
 - (d) all required evidence has been submitted demonstrating that the claimant has exhausted customary and reasonable efforts to collect.
- (9) Application Review. Upon receipt of the application with all required attachments and notarized affidavit, the fund administrator shall inspect all documents for their veracity. If the fund administrator determines that said documents verify that the owner has exhausted all customary and reasonable efforts to collect the award without success, the fund administrator may order payment out of the guaranty fund for the amount of the owner's actual loss.

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(10) Six Month Application Deadline. Payments from the fund may be awarded only if the fund administrator receives an application within six months of the date upon which a court judgment or arbitration finding issued against the registrant.

(11) Repayment to Guaranty Fund by Contractor. If a contractor's registration is revoked pursuant to M.G.L. c. 142A, § 15(b), the contractor would not be eligible to receive a new or renewed registration or to operate under another registration until the entire amount of the claim, plus a reasonable amount of interest to be determined by the fund administrator, has been repaid to the fund in full, beginning from the time said claim was disbursed from the fund.

(12) Claims Procedure for Exhausted Fund. If at anytime the money deposited in the fund is insufficient to satisfy the approved claim or portion thereof, the fund administrator, when sufficient money has been deposited in the fund, shall satisfy the unpaid claims or portions thereof in the order that the claims were originally filed.

(13) Authorization to Proceed Against Contractor. If the registrant does not repay the amount paid from the fund, plus interest, according to the term is set forth by the fund administrator pursuant to 201 CMR 14.20(2), the fund administrator shall notify the Attorney General who shall be authorized to initiate proceedings in superior court against said contractor for failure to reimburse the fund.

(14) Court Judgment or Arbitration Award Requirement. A court judgment or arbitration award required by M.G.L. c. 142A, § 5 and 201 CMR 14.00 may be satisfied by presenting to the Fund Administrator the following:

- (a) documentation from & United States Bankruptcy Court confirming that:
 1. the contractor's debts have been discharged;
 2. the bankruptcy case has been closed; and
 3. the homeowner is precluded by the Bankruptcy Court from pursuing a court judgment or arbitration award against the contractor;
- (b) proof of the existence of a valid cause of action arising out of the improvement of an owner-occupied, one-to-four family residential home by a registered contractor or subcontractor for conduct alleged to be work performed in a poor or unworkmanlike manner which is a common law violation or a violation of any statute or regulation designed for the protection of consumers;
- (c) evidence that the claim was presented within two years and six months of the date the contract was signed by the parties; and
- (d) proof of actual loss calculated pursuant to M.G.L. c.142A and 201 CMR 14.13.

The Fund Administrator shall hold a written hearing to consider the evidence and render a decision on the homeowner's eligibility for reimbursement from the Fund, pursuant to 201 CMR 14.06.

14.22: Miscellaneous

(1) OCABR Arbitration Oversight. The OCABR shall maintain oversight responsibility to promote the fairness and efficiency of the private arbitration services program.

(2) OCABR Advisory Opinions. The director of OCABR may from time to time develop internal guidelines for the operation of the private arbitration services program and may issue advisory opinions.

(3) Waiver. The director of OCABR may, in his or her sole discretion, waive any of 201 CMR 14.00, if such waiver would be in the public interest and would further the purpose or intent of the private arbitration services program or guaranty fund

(4) Non-Preclusion of Additional Remedies. A claim to the guaranty fund shall not limit the availability of other legal or equitable remedies unless the claim made is for the full amount of the value of the work claimed as damages, in which case the registrant, upon repayment to the fund, may use repayment as a defense via settlement.

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(5) Correspondence Copies. Copies of all correspondence any party sends to the arbitrator, the arbitration firm or the director of OCABR after the acceptance of the request for arbitration shall be sent to the other party.

(6) Effective Date. 201 CMR 14.00 shall apply to home improvement contracts entered into on or after July 1,1992.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY

201 CMR 14.00: M.G.L. c. 142A.

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